

**Abstract ID :** 725

**Title :** An education and public outreach program for the protection of the West Indian manatee in Puerto Rico.

**Category :** Conservation

**Student :** Not Applicable

**Preferred Format :** Poster Presentation

**Abstract :** The population of the West Indian Manatee (*Trichechus manatus*) in Puerto Rico is endangered and estimated to be around 200 individuals. During the last ten years, the majority of human related deaths of manatees were caused by boat collisions. To help reduce the adverse impact of human activities in the survival of the species, we have developed since 1990 an education and outreach program to educate the citizens and government officials on the endangered status of the manatee and the need for positive actions to help preserve the species. Several approaches were used, including public service announcements (press, radio and television), brochures, posters, lecture circuits in schools and at our laboratory, and regular visits to commercial malls. We have heavily relied on a bilingual Internet webpage to convey information on the species and on the programs being carried out to study and preserve the species. We have also partnered with local and national corporations, developing together outreach campaigns to better focus on specific user groups. We have measured the effect of the campaign over the years by the growing interest of schools and particulars in requesting additional information, and by the growing number of visitors to our webpage and laboratory. In our island setting, manatee protection will be achieved by a combination of scientific research and effective and efficient government management, but without education and changing cultural and personal attitudes towards wildlife and environmental protection, at all levels, this will not be completely possible.